



# AQUIDNECK ISLAND PLANNING COMMISSION

SERVING MIDDLETOWN – NEWPORT – PORTSMOUTH

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March 6, 2014

The Honorable Marlene Dortch  
Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On behalf of the municipalities of Middletown, Newport, and Portsmouth, RI – which together comprise Aquidneck Island – and the Aquidneck Island Broadband Project, I am happy to submit this unbinding Expression of Interest in making a formal application to the Rural Broadband Experiment WC Docket #10-90 for funding to bring high-speed broadband connectivity to this community, which so desperately needs it.

Following this cover is a brief outline describing the project we envision, our work to date, and our plans for the future. We thank you for this opportunity, we look forward to providing considerably more detail in a formal application later in the year, and we look forward to working with you and the Commission to ensure equal access to connectivity for all.

Sincerely,

Tina Dolen  
Executive Director

## **Background**

**Fall 2011** – A group of island businesses and residents raised the issue of how subpar delivery of Internet services is impacting business operations, growth, and employment on Island.

**January 2012** – A group of concerned citizens began work with Newport city officials to address issues of subpar internet resources on Island.

**March 2012** – Newport IT Working Group starts looking at Internet and IT infrastructure issues. Island wide broadband advisory group established.

**May 2013 – October 2013** Aquidneck Island Broadband Project (AIBP) conducts Internet speed tests across Island, finds Internet resources much slower than available elsewhere in RI and beyond. AIBP tests Internet speeds in 200+ businesses, identifies 200+ participants looking for faster, more reliable fiber access.

**August 2013** – OSHEAN (Ocean State Higher Education Economic Development and Administrative Network) fiber network, a federally funded ARRA BTOP project to bring better faster cheaper Internet to US taxpayers, is completed on Aquidneck Island.

**November 2013** – Aquidneck Island Broadband Advisory Group releases request for information (RFI) to identify vendors offering solutions and services needed to deliver fiber broadband service to Island based on best practices and industry standards. Eight responses – ranging from full service provider to vendors offering planning, construction, fiber deployment, and outsourced network management – together promise a complete fiber solution for Island.

**December 2013** – Broadband Rhode Island (BBRI) hosts facilitated meeting of public and private sector professionals to envision requirements for better Internet on Island. Meeting documents the need for better faster more reliable fiber Internet to support key initiatives to improve public safety, support STEAM education, economic development focused on cyber security, climate change, disaster resilience, and telemedicine, while promoting greater shared government services and more work and live businesses on the island.

## **Project Partners**

This proposal is presented by the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission on behalf of the three municipalities that comprise Aquidneck Island – Middletown, Newport, and Portsmouth, RI – and the Aquidneck Island Broadband Project (AIBP). AIBP represents a strong collaboration among more than a dozen highly invested partners to leverage state-of-the-art broadband infrastructure and Information Technology services to promote:

- Economic development
- Improved quality of life
- Innovative and complete solutions to incubate personal, educational, and business/civic investment opportunities on Aquidneck Island.

The Working Group partners include:

- Businesses
- Public safety personnel
- Salve Regina University
- Non-profits, including AIBPconnect and Aquidneck Island Planning Commission
- Southeastern New England Defense Industry Alliance

Additional partners include:

- RI Economic Development Corporation (now Department of Commerce)
- Ocean State Higher Education Economic Development and Administrative Network (OSHEAN)
- RI State Division of Information Technology (RI State Administrative Department)

- Broadband Rhode Island
- Newport County Chamber of Commerce
- The Preservation Society of Newport County

### **Proposed Service Area**

AIBP is proposing to serve CAIs, businesses, and residents throughout the Island that currently do not have access to robust and affordable broadband solutions. Two census tracts are unserved. It is estimated that some 95% of the Island – and 100% of businesses and residences that call it home – lacks access to fiber based broadband.

### **Community Anchor Institutions**

Aquidneck Island Christian Academy  
(Portsmouth)  
Aquidneck School (Middletown)  
Elmhurst School (Portsmouth)  
Howard Hathaway School (Portsmouth)  
Melville Elementary School (Portsmouth)  
Portsmouth Abbey School (Portsmouth)  
Portsmouth Fire Department (Portsmouth)  
Portsmouth Free Public Library (Portsmouth)  
Portsmouth High School (Portsmouth)  
Portsmouth Middle School (Portsmouth)  
Portsmouth Police Department (Portsmouth)  
Portsmouth School District (Portsmouth)  
Prudence Island School (Portsmouth)  
Prudence Island Volunteer Fire Department  
(Portsmouth)  
Rhode Island State Police - Portsmouth  
Barracks  
Portsmouth Town Hall (Portsmouth)  
St. Philomena School (Portsmouth)  
The Pennfield School (Portsmouth)  
Middletown Fire Department (Middletown)  
Middletown High School (Middletown)  
Middletown Police Department (Middletown)  
Middletown Public Library (Middletown)  
Middletown Public Schools (Middletown)  
St. George's School (Middletown)  
Valley Community School (Middletown)  
Looking Upwards (Middletown)  
Middletown Town Hall (Middletown)  
Forest Avenue School (Middletown)  
John F. Kennedy School (Middletown)  
Joseph H. Gaudet School (Middletown)  
Naval Health Clinic New England (Newport)  
Naval Station Newport Fire Department –  
DOD (Newport)  
New Visions for Newport County (Newport)

Newport Area Career and Technical Center  
(Newport)  
Newport City Hal (Newport)  
Newport County Sheriff's Office (Newport)  
Newport Fire Department Station 1 (Newport)  
Newport Fire Department Station 2 (Newport)  
Newport Fire Department Station 5 (Newport)  
Newport Police Department (Newport)  
Newport Public Library (Newport)  
Redwood Library & Athenaeum (Newport)  
Rogers High School (Newport)  
Salve Regina University (Newport)  
Sheffield School (Newport)  
St. Joseph of Cluny Sisters' School (Newport)  
St. Michael's Country Day School (Newport)  
The Met at East Bay (Newport)  
Salve Regina University McKillop Library  
(Newport)  
Triplett School (Newport)  
US Naval War College (Newport)  
US Customs and Border Protection – Port of  
Entry – Newport (Newport)  
US Navy Ambulatory Care Center (Newport)  
William J. Underwood School (Newport)  
CCRI Newport County Campus (Newport)  
East Bay Family Healthcare – Newport  
(Newport)  
James L. Maher Center (Newport)  
Carey School (Newport)  
Coggeshall School (Newport)



**Proposed Technology**

We will build an open access fiber network that will provide voice, data, and broadband services with speeds ranging from 100 Mbps to one Gigabit.

**Proposed Services**

We will offer fast and reliable Internet and voice-over IP, and we will facilitate such value added cloud services as backup and recovery, cyber security (especially maritime), climate change monitoring, and telehealth.

**Existing Providers**

First mile incumbents Cox Communications (cable provider with no plans to provide fiber) and Verizon (DSL provider which does offer fiber to the majority of RI towns but has made a business decision not to bring it to the Island) provide slower, less reliable, and more costly service than Island users – and potential users – deserve and are demanding. OSHEAN, which does provide fiber-based broadband, is a middle mile provider. We are in conversation with OSHEAN now to determine the best way to work together to shore up and augment best practice service provision to Island CAIs, and we will build out from their existing infrastructure to provide much-needed connectivity to additional CAIs and to businesses and residences.

**Timeline**

We are using an organic and iterative approach that will ensure community buy in. We are actively engaged in education and outreach around gigabit fiber; in the past year we have conducted two community forums and plan to facilitate a June 2014 forum/workshop for industry experts, local and state legislators, community broadband implementers, Broadband RI, and vendors. We are generating positive local press and editorial contributions. We are in conversation with OSHEAN to partner with them around ensuring all CAIs are connected and safely backed up. In April 2014 we will begin a feasibility study to determine Island wide aggregate demand, which process will inform our priority installation areas upon funding and permitting. We will ensure all CAIs are connected first, and we will then connect from these to businesses and residences, ensuring that all Island users – and potential users – are receiving the fastest, most reliable, and most cost effective services.

**Total cost of the project**

We estimate a range of \$8-\$12 million per year over 3-5 years, to include construction and service design/implementation.

**Additional sources of support**

In addition to our RFI respondents, we are in communication now with other communities to explore possible funding avenues that will supplement our request to the FCC through the Connect America Fund. We are in the process now of finalizing a request to the State through Commerce RI. We plan to pursue grant opportunities through local foundations, and we will continue to seek additional resources. We look forward to recurring revenues as our customer base builds, and as we provide open access to such cloud services as backup and recovery, cyber security, and telehealth providers.

**ETC status**

We are not an ETC now and are in the process – with the support of a technical consultant and informed by the RFI process – of determining the most efficient and effective carrier model that will ensure our vision of a safe, economically vibrant, and powerfully connected Aquidneck Island becomes reality.